

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 4 January 2026 - **Epiphany** - The Second Sunday of Christmas

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Isaiah 60.1-6; Psalm 72. [1-9] 10-15; Ephesians 3.1-12; Matthew 2.1-12

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Devin McLachlan, Bishop's Advisor for Inter-Faith, and Vicar of St Bene't's, Cambridge

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. (Matt 2.12)

One of the remarkable themes of the gospel
is the number of people who encounter Jesus and then — leave.

Sometimes with indifference,
sometimes going away rejoicing.

Not only do they not stay,
they are not shamed for leaving
“Go on your way,” Jesus tells the women and men he healed.

Go on your way.

It's a pattern we see even at the start of Jesus' ministry.

The magi, “having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod,
...left for their own country by another road.”

These mysterious astronomers, likely from Persia in what is now Iran,
exit, pursued by a king.

But imagine for a moment,
a Gospel where the magi stayed,
and every healed leper,
and the five thousand who were fed,

(not to mention the women and children)...

I'm not sure it would be the Gospel that gives us life even today.

It wouldn't be the Gospel of God's redeeming work,
but just the story of Jesus, God's very popular son.

The good news isn't only about Jesus;
it is about the lives he changed,
and how that change has rippled out throughout the Universe,
continuing to redeem us and all Creation.

It's why Luke pairs his Gospel with the Acts of the Apostles,
telling first the story of Jesus,
and then the story of the early church who went on our way,
sharing the Good News in places both near and far,
with many languages, peoples and nations.

Perhaps this why Matthew lets us know that the magi went home by another road.
Because it's why the work of the church doesn't end when you walk in this door —

The work of the church begins when you walk out that door.

*And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod,
they left for their own country by another road.*

I wonder what happened to the Magi when they came home,
having offered their gifts to the newborn king.

Did they learn what kind of king he became?
Did they hear of his miracles?
Did they hear of his death as a common criminal?
Did they hear of the empty tomb?

...

Legend tells us that they did;
St Thomas, who history records founded churches along the Malabar coast of India,
is said to have baptised the magi;
they went on to be great evangelists of the faith,
forsaking worldly wisdom and titles

for the scandal and foolishness of Christ crucified.

But to get to their faith,
first they had to go home by another way.

That's the story for so many who have come here to our church.

We come to this place bearing gifts —
greater than gold or frankincense or myrrh.
We come bearing the seed of God's Word, destined to grow,
meant to nurture the faith of those around you.

We bring our singing hearts, our days' doxology, our gold.
We bring our stillness, our glimpses of serenity, our frankincense.
We bring our brokenness, our tears, our myrrh.ⁱ

And then we go home by another way,
to live and speak God's praise.ⁱⁱ

For years upon years, our church has stood in this place
— not to hoard gifts like dragon-gold, not to be the terminal stop,
but to send women and men, young and old, out from these doors
bearing new gifts *from* Christ *to* the world,
each going home by a new road,
because the Spirit has transformed us in this place.

Our work as a church is to equip the saints.ⁱⁱⁱ
For a thousand years we have welcomed in the stranger, of every age,
from a great diversity of traditions and languages and backgrounds;
and every day, and across the years,
sent them out again, building up in love.^{iv}

We have fed and taught and learned from one another,
wept and sang and been still in prayer together,
until, having found God anew,
we are ready to go home by another way,

What gifts have you brought this day?
What tears and songs and stillness
have you brought to this home of the Christ child?

And today, when you step out from these doors,
 forgiven, healed, renewed,
What gift, what treasure Good News,
 will you carry from this place?

Will you go home by a different way,
 transformed by the news of the boundless riches of Christ,
that the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known.⁴

Amen.

Endnotes:

¹ Adapted from a poem by Kate Compston in Bread of Tomorrow: Praying with the World's Poor,

My singing heart, my days' doxology, my gold

I bring for celebration

My stillness, my glimpses of serenity, my frankincense

I bring for meditation

My brokenness, my tears of rage and sorrow, my myrrh

I bring for sacrifice

² Brian A. Wren, "I Come With Joy to Meet My Lord", hymn, verse 5:

Together met, together bound,

we'll go our different ways

and as his people in the world,

we'll live and speak his praise.

³ Ephesians 4.12, "...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."

⁴ Ephesians 4.16

This sermon was adapted and revised from an Epiphany sermon preached at St Bene't's, Cambridge

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how the wise men felt when they found Jesus? I wonder what Mary thought?
- I wonder why King Herod was frightened?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?

- I wonder why the wise men had a dream not to go back to King Herod?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

Lord Jesus, as we remember the Wise Men who came from afar to worship you, so we pray for your whole church throughout the world, gathered in many languages and traditions. We pray especially for those who, like the Wise Men, are persecuted for their faith. In our Anglican Communion we join this week in praying for The Church of the Province of Central Africa. We pray for Sarah, our Archbishop-Elect, for Dagmar our Acting Bishop, and for the mission and ministry and people of this church. May we, like the magi, be given by you the gift of adoration.

Lord of glory,

Hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus, you received from the Magi gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. As we begin a new year, may we offer up to you the gifts of our hearts and minds, and offer to you all that we are, knowing that all gifts come from you. [*We give special thanks this week for*]

Lord of glory,

Hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus, the Magi came to worship you, and knew you as the Ruler of All. We pray for all those in positions of leadership, that they might know you as the one true source of authority. We pray for all those who work for justice, and for all those who seek peace [*Especially in the Holy Land, in Ukraine and*]

Lord of glory,

Hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus, when you were born among us your family lived in fear, exile and the shadow of death. Look in mercy on the poor, the disposed, the homeless and the refugee. Help us in our time of need, and give us generous hearts to help others. *We pray especially for*

Lord of glory,

Hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus, you shared the life of home and family: Father, protect in your love our neighbours, our families and this community of which we are a part. *We pray especially for ...*

Lord of glory,

Hear our prayer.

Father, we rejoice in our fellowship
with the shepherds, the angels, the magi,
the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph
and all the faithful departed.
In your unfailing love for us and for all people,
hear and answer our prayers through your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Parts of these intercessions are adapted from the Intercessions for Epiphany (H1) in Common Worship: Times and Seasons

Suggested hymns/songs

We Three Kings

I come with joy

What child is this

Love came down at Christmas

Brightest and Best are the Stars of the Morning

As with gladness men of old

O Star of Christ's Appearing

O worship the lord in the beauty of holiness

Activities to accompany the service

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
 - <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
 - <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
 - [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
 - [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
 - <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@ lectionary resource)
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